

The Potential of Youth Activism in Promoting Dialogue on Climate Crisis in Poland and Germany

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Introduction

In a world divided by borders and conflicts, the need for open, constructive dialogue has never been more pressing. The challenges that humanity faces, such as the existential threat of climate crisis, recognize no national boundaries. They affect us all, regardless of where we call home. In this era of global interconnectedness, it is becoming increasingly evident that dialogue is not merely a choice but a necessity—a powerful tool for fostering understanding, unity, and collective action. Nowhere is this need for dialogue more palpable than in the vibrant and impassioned youth climate movement sweeping across Europe. In this article, we embark on a journey to explore the insights gleaned from surveys conducted among European youth activists in multiple countries. Beyond the statistics and figures, these insights confirm a profound truth: dialogue is the linchpin that can unlock the transformative potential of the next generation in the fight against climate change. The urgency of the climate crisis knows no borders. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and ecological degradation affect communities worldwide. Yet, amid these challenges, European youth are stepping into a role of global significance. They are transcending national divides and, in doing so, demonstrating the catalytic power of dialogue in addressing the most pressing issues of our time.

In this article, we will shed light on the crucial nexus between European youth, climate activism, and the art of debate. While youth activism holds significant promise in addressing the climate crisis, one pressing sociological problem is understanding and bridging the generational divides in climate crisis perceptions and activism. Through surveys, we aim to uncover the nuanced motivations, strategies, and perspectives that drive this generation of climate activists. We seek to understand how the shared concern for our planet has become a bridge over the borders that once divided us. Central to our exploration is the notion that dialogue is not just about talking, but about listening, learning, and building bridges of understanding. It's about recognizing that the climate crisis affects different regions and communities in unique ways, and acknowledging the necessity of cooperative action. European youth have embraced this ethos, leveraging their passion, determination, and digital connectivity to foster dialogue that transcends cultural, linguistic, and political boundaries. This dialogue is essential to ensure that local, national, and international efforts are coordinated and that the most vulnerable populations are protected.

Origin and Role of Youth in Climate Activism

The origins of youth climate activism are inextricably linked to the historical underpinnings of both environmental and social movements, reflecting a rich tapestry of interconnected forces that have shaped the engagement of young people with climate issues (Kester, 2017). To fully appreciate the context in which today's young activists have immersed themselves in climate action, it is

imperative to embark on a historical journey that delves into the broader socio-political landscape and the emergence of environmental consciousness. This journey unveils the multifaceted roots that have given rise to youth activism within the environmental and climate spheres.

The 1960s and 1970s stand out as a pivotal period for environmentalism. During this transformative era, a growing awareness began to crystallize regarding the detrimental impacts of rapid industrialization on the natural world. It was during this time that iconic environmental movements, exemplified by dedicated conservation efforts to safeguard cherished natural treasures like the Grand Canyon, captured the public's imagination. The crowning achievement of this era was the inaugural Earth Day celebration in 1970, a momentous occasion that underscored the burgeoning environmental consciousness (De Moor & Della Porta, 2020). Yet, the influence of these decades transcended environmental concerns alone. The civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1960s played an indelible role in shaping the mindset of young activists. These transformative social movements not only emphasized the potency of collective action but also underscored the paramount importance of challenging systemic injustices and instigating profound social change. The experiences garnered from active participation in these movements would later prove invaluable for the young activists who would eventually step onto the climate activism stage.

The emergence of youth climate activism can be mapped through a series of pivotal events and milestones that gradually thrust environmental and climate issues into the global spotlight. One watershed moment was the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, famously known as the Rio Earth Summit, held in 1992. Although youth participation during this conference was relatively limited, it marked the incipient stages of a global conversation on environmental matters that would eventually capture the attention and fervor of young activists. Another significant landmark was the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997. This groundbreaking international agreement represented the world's first concerted effort to curtail greenhouse gas emissions. It was during this period that youth-led organizations and student groups embarked on mobilization efforts centered around the Kyoto Protocol, intensifying awareness and fervently pushing for more robust commitments from governments (Jacquet, 2016).

The landscape of youth climate activism underwent a profound transformation in the 2000s and 2010s, primarily driven by the meteoric rise of digital communication platforms. In particular, the advent of social media emerged as a seismic shift that provided young activists with unprecedented tools for organizing, mobilizing, and disseminating their messages (Castells, 2015). However, a final factor of paramount significance must be highlighted in the context of the contemporary youth climate movement: the emergence of "Fridays for Future" in 2018, spearheaded by the Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg. Greta's audacious and solitary school strike for climate action held steadfastly in front of the Swedish Parliament, sent shockwaves across the globe, igniting a global movement. Her unwavering determination and outspoken advocacy resonated deeply with young activists from diverse corners of the world, galvanizing a new generation to take to the streets and demand tangible climate action.

The above-described historical trajectory underscores the intricate interplay between burgeoning environmental consciousness, the influence of transformative social movements, the formulation of international agreements, the disruptive force of technological advancements, and the inspirational leadership that has collectively contributed to the origins and evolution of youth climate activism. It reflects a continuum of engagement that has sculpted the passionate, resolute,

and visionary youth activists of today (Kester, 2017; De Moor & Della Porta, 2020; Jacquet, 2016; Castells, 2015).

The roots of youth climate activism are deeply embedded in a confluence of critical factors, forging a compelling narrative of the rising wave of youth engagement with climate issues. Several key elements underpin the emergence and steadfast commitment of today's youth activists. First and foremost, the youth of today are coming of age in a world fraught with escalating environmental degradation, the specter of frequent climate-related disasters, and the ominous shadow of a future marred by the consequences of inaction. This looming existential threat to their future serves as a powerful catalyst, propelling them into the realm of climate activism (Kester, 2017). It is an activism borne not only out of concern but also out of a profound sense of urgency and responsibility.

Secondly, today's youth are characterized by their adeptness in utilizing digital technology and harnessing the power of social media as formidable tools for communication, organization, and the rapid dissemination of information on a global scale (Singer et al., 2019). In the context of climate activism, the role of social media cannot be overstated. It has become the lifeblood of youth-led movements, enabling them to transcend geographical boundaries, connect with like-minded individuals, and orchestrate impactful campaigns. This digital fluency has given youth activists unprecedented reach and influence in their advocacy efforts.

Youth climate activists are not passive onlookers; they are passionate advocates for change, deeply committed to catalyzing meaningful transformation. Their engagement takes multifarious forms, ranging from the orchestration of strikes and protests, as evidenced by the global climate strikes (De Moor & Della Porta, 2020), to grassroots campaigns meticulously designed to raise climate awareness within their communities (Malinen & Virtanen, 2020). Creativity abounds within this cohort, with youth activists employing art, music, and storytelling as powerful mediums to convey their message and mobilize their peers (Kester, 2017). Moreover, youth-led movements like "Fridays for Future," galvanized by the indefatigable Greta Thunberg, have thrust the voices of young activists onto the global stage. Through these movements, youth demand transparency and accountability from political leaders and corporate entities alike, while vociferously advocating for the implementation of ambitious climate policies (Baldwin et al., 2017). Their collective efforts have exerted substantial influence on public opinion and policy agendas (Baldwin et al., 2017), amplifying the importance of their role in the broader climate discourse.

Youth climate activism is by no means monolithic; it is a vibrant tapestry of diverse perspectives and approaches. Many young activists actively integrate climate justice into their activism, recognizing the disproportionate and unjust impacts of climate change on marginalized communities (Kester, 2017). This intersectionality within youth climate activism enhances its inclusivity and resonance with broader social justice movements (Malinen & Virtanen, 2020). However, the path of youth climate activism is not without its obstacles. Young activists often encounter resistance from entrenched interests, scepticism from certain quarters, and the emotional toll of confronting an immense global crisis (Kester, 2017). The transition from street protests to meaningful policy change remains a formidable challenge (Van Holsteijn & Feskens, 2017). Nevertheless, the resilience and determination that define youth activists persist. As they continue to gain experience and knowledge, young activists are increasingly equipped to navigate the complex political landscapes that govern climate policy. They are forging alliances with other social justice movements, recognizing that the fight against climate change is inseparable from the broader struggle for a more equitable world (Malinen & Virtanen, 2020).

In the sociological landscape, the role of youth in climate activism serves as a potent testament to the transformative potential of collective action and the capacity for generational shifts in social consciousness. Their motivations, strategies, and unyielding commitment make them instrumental agents of change in the global battle against climate change. By steadfastly amplifying their voices and tirelessly advocating for systemic change, youth climate activists hold the promise of steering humanity toward a more sustainable and equitable future.

Methodology: Surveys Across European Countries

The “EU24 – Engage for the Planet” project addresses the critical issue of climate change, recognizing that effective solutions demand transnational cooperation. The project aims to increase the participation among young citizens, individuals from diverse backgrounds, and mobile union citizens in democratic processes. Despite overall high election turnouts, certain segments of society remain underrepresented in active voting and democratic involvement. EU24 seeks to counter this trend by instilling empowerment and demonstrating that every voice matters, thereby cultivating a vibrant and inclusive European political community capable of shaping political discourse.

Young people's concern about the climate crisis does not directly translate into political engagement. While their satisfaction with democracy and interest in European elections increase, compared with the overall European population they are still less likely to vote (Eurobarometer, 2023). To increase youth political participation, it is essential to first better understand their motivations to engage in climate crisis related actions and find the best, most inclusive methods of dialogue. For this purpose, we designed a multinational survey that we conducted in several European countries (Poland, Germany, France, and the Netherlands) between March and August 2023. Links to the corresponding language version of the survey together with the short project description were available on the project website and distributed via social media and email connections of the project partners in their countries. The 14 questions of the survey were specifically designed to collect data on young people's climate crisis awareness, their knowledge of ways of political engagement and their active involvement.

Three additional questions were there to collect basic demographic information. To increase the inclusivity and participation, the English language version was available for participants from other European countries or those who did not speak the language of the country where the survey was conducted. In this case, answers that could be attributed to the participating countries were included in the main analysis.

The quantity of feedback we received varied among the participating countries. In Poland, we had the highest participation with 100 respondents in the survey, followed by 85 in Germany, 42 in France, and 8 in the Netherlands. Additionally, the survey reached participants in Spain, Sweden, Greece, Italy, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Ireland, and the UK. However, due to the relatively low response numbers in some countries, drawing meaningful conclusions from the entire dataset would be challenging. Therefore, we focused our analysis on the two countries with the highest number of participants: Poland and Germany. While we acknowledge that this may not represent the entirety of the youth population in these countries, it still provides valuable insights into these particular groups.

The majority of participants, i.e., 62% in Poland and 44% in Germany, came from large cities (over 500 000 inhabitants). In Germany, the second-largest group (32%) came from cities between 10

000 and 100 000 inhabitants. In both countries, twice as many females (62% in Poland and 58% in Germany) as males (30% PL and 29% DE) participated in the survey. Circa 5% were nonbinary persons, finally, 3% in Poland and 8% in Germany did not want to reveal their gender. In Poland, the largest age group was between the ages of 20 and 25 (52%) and the second largest were the 14-19 year olds (30%) while in Germany the oldest group (26-30 y.o., 42%) was closely followed by the 20-25 year olds (36%).

When asked about the most important values, around half of each group chose the *protection of human rights and democracy* (52% DE, 50% PL). The second most significant value was *solidarity between people* (15%) for the German group and *gender equality* (11%) for the Polish group. What is relevant with European surveys (Special Eurobarometer 2021) shows that Germans more than average in the EU appreciate the EU's respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law. At the same time, their Polish counterparts value the standard of living of EU citizens the most. Environmental issues and climate change are seen by Germans as the main challenge for the EU as well as a main global issue. While climate change plays a significant role for Polish people, social inequalities and migration issues within the EU and risks related to health globally are the main concerns.

Awareness and Agency

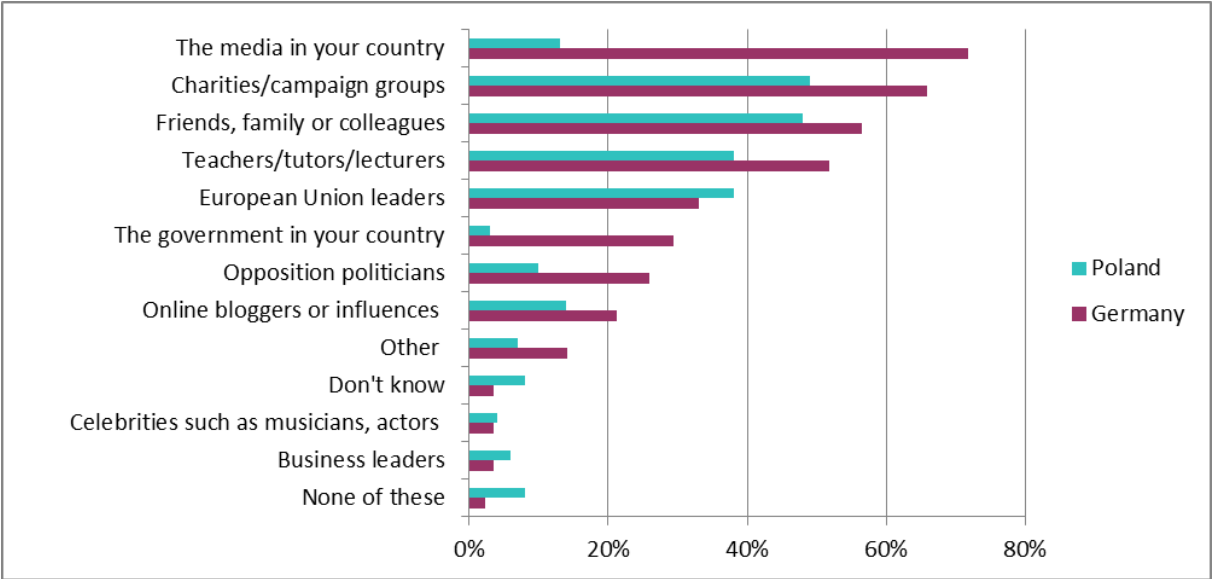
In this section, we delve into the intricate realm of awareness and agency among young people in both Poland and Germany regarding climate-related matters. We explore the issue of the diverse sources of information they rely on, providing insights into their trust levels and preferences. Moving forward, we explore young people's perceptions of agency in shaping decisions, laws, and policies addressing the climate crisis across various political levels. Our exploration further uncovers their engagement in various local activities related to climate activism. Finally, we turn our attention to the pressing concerns of these young individuals.

The sources of information that young people choose can vary significantly depending on their individual preferences, backgrounds, and experiences. Knowing who the young people trust to give them information about issues Europe faces is crucial to creating a meaningful dialogue (Fig. 1). Here we observed important differences between the two participating groups but also a high awareness and insight into the political situation in the country. From all listed sources, young Polish people trust their *government* the least (3%), whereas 29% of young Germans show trust in their government. This is a very clear statement of complete distrust of the Polish government's actions related to the climate crisis. It is further confirmed by placing the *media* as one of the least trustworthy sources (13%). In Poland, with a large portion of media subordinate to the government, trust in public media has been eroding in recent years. This aversion contrasts sharply with the fact that the German participants selected the media as the most trusted source of information in their country (72%).

Both groups unmistakably express their preferences by showing little trust in information provided by *celebrities* (4% PL, 4% DE) and *business leaders* (6% PL, 4% DE). For both groups, other trustworthy sources of information are groups and institutions dedicated to causes relevant to young people: *charities and campaign groups* (49% PL, 66% DE). Further, young people often rely on information shared by their *friends, family, or colleagues* (48% PL, 56% DE). Finally, *teachers, tutors and lecturers*, seen as knowledgeable sources, are also trusted to provide credible information (38% PL, 52% DE). Interestingly, German participants derive their information from more sources than

their Polish peers, which potentially allows for a more balanced tone of the received information and can play a role in evaluating the credibility of individual sources.

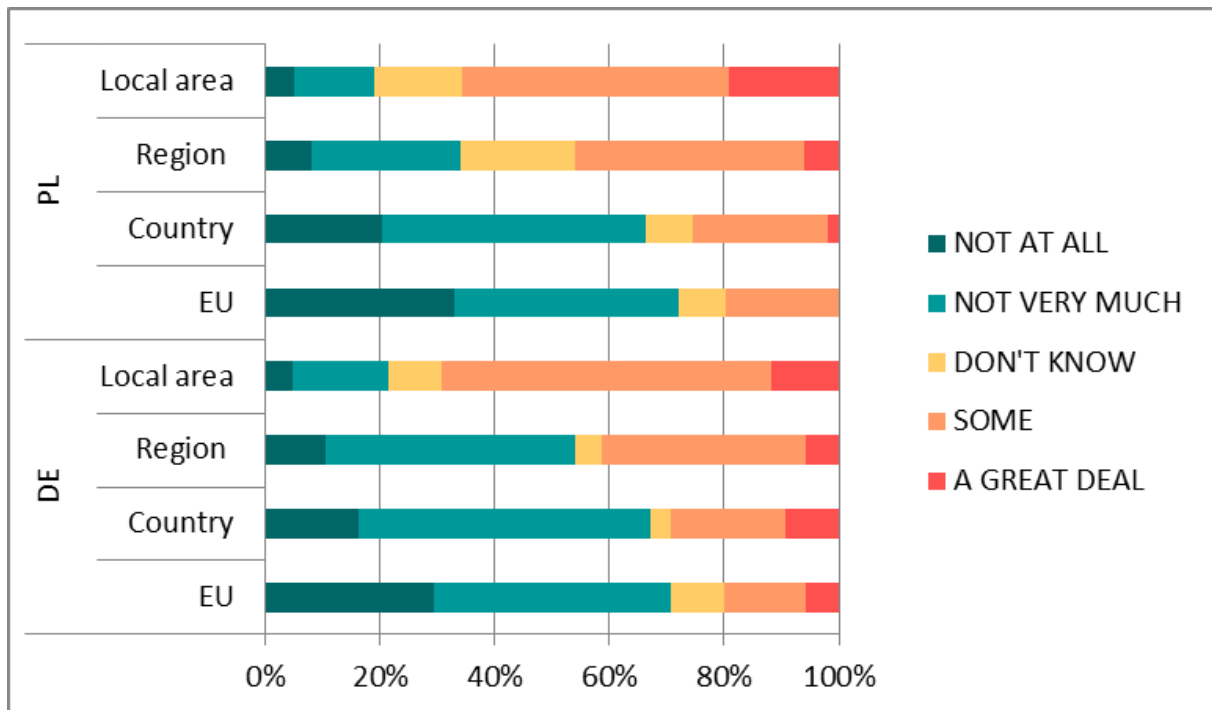
Figure 1. Which of the following, if any, would you trust to give you information about issues facing Europe?



With the current access to information, a sense of the enormity of the problems associated with the climate crisis can be overwhelming, especially for young people. On the other hand, with the support of peer networks, it can also be extremely motivating to act. To better understand young people's perception of agency, we asked them to gauge their individual ability to influence important decisions, laws, and policies addressing and mitigating the climate crisis regarding their local area, region, country, and the European Union.

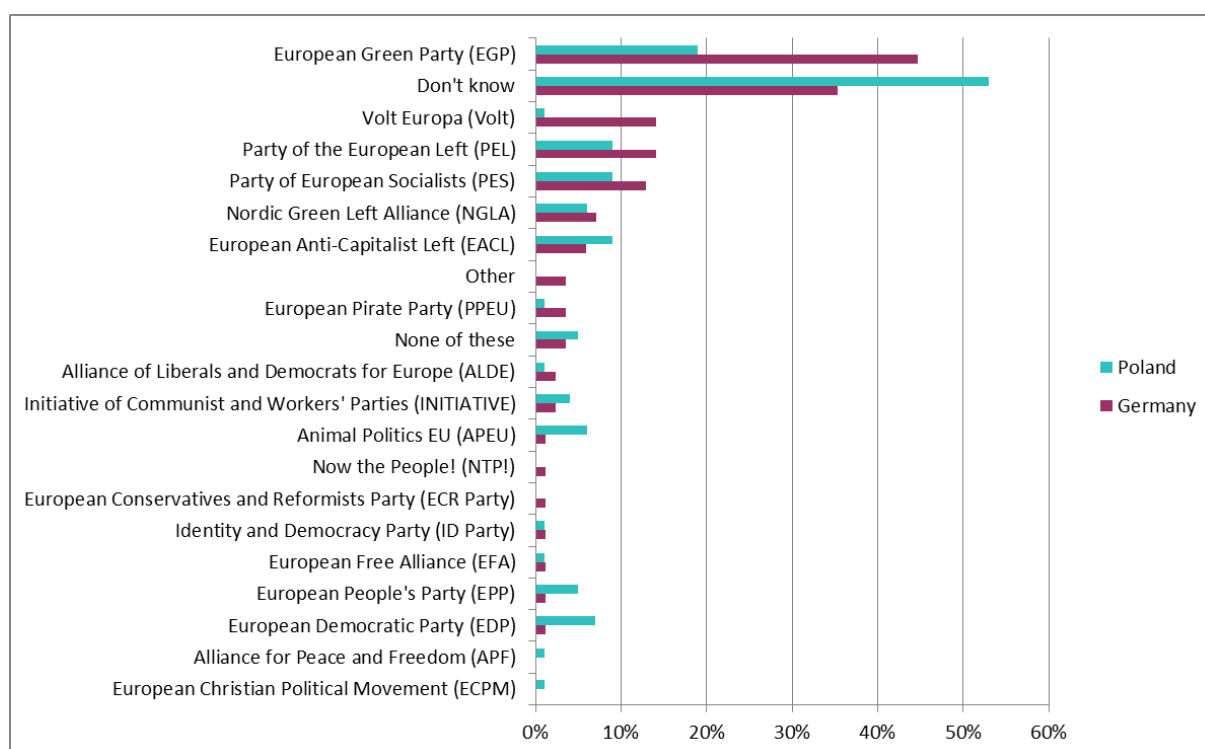
Overall, young people in both countries have similar perceptions as to how much they can influence decisions on different political levels (Fig. 2). Both groups feel the most optimistic on the local level, with around 57% of young people in Germany and 46% in Poland being confident that they can change a great deal. This feeling of confidence decreases with each higher geopolitical level. The respondents still show some confidence in having an impact in their region or federal state. However, when it comes to the country level, the most common notion is that they cannot do very much (46% in Poland and 51% in Germany). Similarly, with the perceptible potential to influence decision-making on the EU level, the most prevalent answer is that they cannot do very much (39% in Poland and 41% in Germany). In this case, however, we observe an increase in the group saying they have no influence (33% in Poland and 29% in Germany). In Germany, we still notice a small group that feels they can have a strong influence on political decisions, 9% and 6% on country and EU levels respectively. This group is much smaller in Poland - only 2% in the country and none on the EU level.

Figure 2. To what extent do you feel you can influence important decisions, laws and policies regarding your local area, your region / federal state, your country as a whole and the European Union as a whole?



Even though the youth have some knowledge about the European Union institutions, their perceived lack of agency translates into lower interest in the European political parties. Many of the participants in both countries know about several ways they can get involved in the work of the European Union. Close to 70% in each country know that they can *write petitions to the European Parliament*. Other relatively well-known options in both countries are: *contacting an MEP about an issue* and *opportunities to visit the European Parliament/ House of European History/ Parliamentarium*. The first one is more well-known within the Polish group (43% PL, 28% DE), while the second is within the German one (40% DE, 30% PL). Yet, when it comes to the European parties, more than half of Polish participants do not know which one they would vote for. Whereas the *European Green Party* would be the first choice for the German group, the second most frequent answer is that, like their Polish peers, they do not know which party to choose (Fig. 3).

Figure 3. Which of these parties would you consider voting for in European elections?



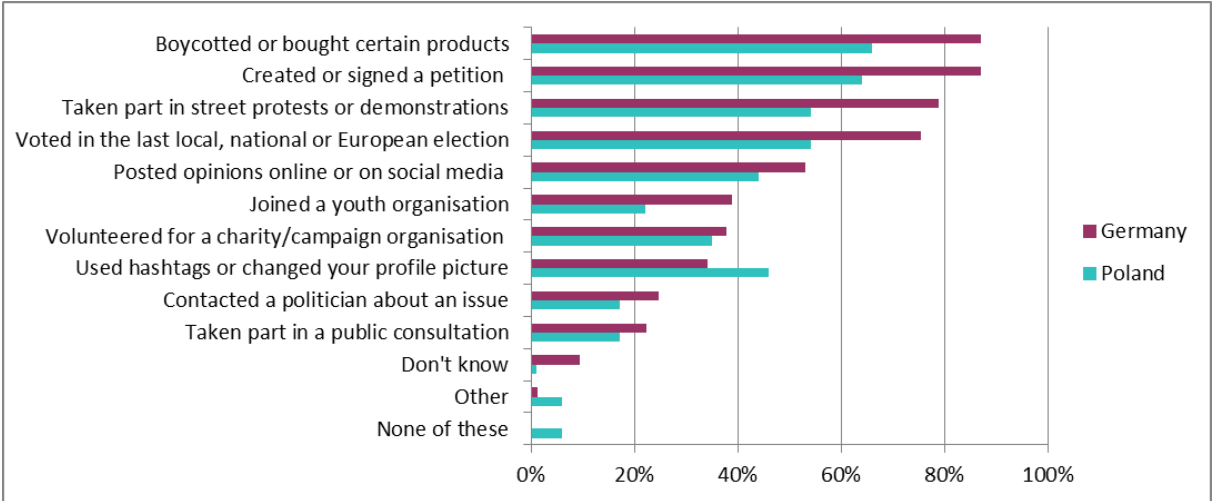
At the local level, it is evident that young people exhibit significantly higher levels of awareness and active participation, as indicated in Figure 4. In both countries, several activities emerged as the most predominant. *Creating or signing a petition (on paper or online)* was a very common practice (64% PL, 87% DE). *Boycotting or buying certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons* also stood out, with 66% of respondents in Poland and 87% in Germany engaging in this form of conscientious consumerism. Also, *taking part in street protests or demonstrations* was embraced by a substantial portion of young people, with 54% in Poland and 79% in Germany joining these public displays of advocacy and activism.

Finally, *voting in the last local, national, or European election* was another notable area of civic involvement (54% PL, 75% DE) (Fig. 4). According to large European surveys, voting is most often considered the best way of having your voice heard by decision-makers. This applies to the overall EU population (Special Eurobarometer 2021), as well as the European youth. Moreover, Polish youth stands significantly above the European average in this regard, but for young Germans, engaging in social media is an even more popular option (Flash Eurobarometer, 2002).

It is conceivable that different participation rates in categories such as voting and other legally age-restricted activities in this study can be attributed, in part, to the age composition of the two groups, specifically the higher presence of younger individuals from Poland who may not yet have reached voting age or did not have the opportunity to vote. Also, the European youth survey (Flash Eurobarometer 2022) points to the substantial age differences in regard to voting. The oldest age group is in this case much more likely to see voting in local, national or European elections as an effective action. While the youngest age group is most likely to think that participating in student or youth organizations is more effective for making young people's voices heard by decision-makers.

Across the entire European Union, approximately one in ten young people has actively participated in an organization dedicated to climate change or environmental issues. German youth exhibit a higher level of activity in this regard, with 18%, surpassing the EU average (Flash Eurobarometer 2022). This is consistent with the results from our survey that young people in Germany appear to engage in a wider range of activities compared to their counterparts in Poland. The sole category where Polish participants outperformed their German counterparts was in the *use of hashtags or changing their profile pictures to express support for political or social causes*, with 46% of Polish participants actively involved compared to 34% in the German group (Fig. 4).

Figure 4. Have you ever done any of the following?

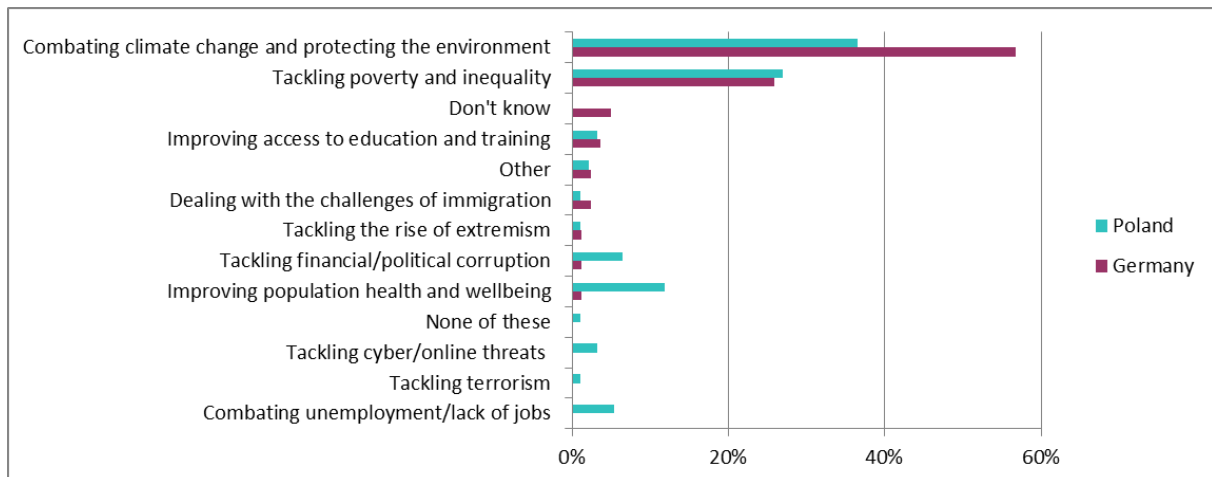


One of the primary goals of the EU24 project is to increase citizen participation in the policymaking process. In order to facilitate the collaboration between policymakers, stakeholders, scientists, and the public, we urgently need suitable methods. To this end, we sought input from participants regarding the formats they have utilized or engaged in for sharing their opinions. Notably, the German group demonstrated greater activity in this regard, evident from the cumulative vote count as participants were permitted to select multiple options.

In both groups, the majority of participants had participated in *surveys* (72% DE, 65% PL). Additionally, in the German group, *interviews* (38% DE, 20% PL), *panel discussions* (35% DE, 19% PL), and *debates* (32% DE, 32% PL) emerged as popular forms of involvement. Approximately one-third of participants from both countries engaged in *commenting on political posts on social media*. For Polish participants, the second and third most preferred modes of engagement were *debates* and *commenting on political posts on social media*.

Finally, one of the most important matters - what are the most pressing issues for young people? What do they expect of the local governments and the European Union? According to the Flash Eurobarometer (2022), young people from the EU prioritize: maintaining peace and enhancing international security (37%), creating more job opportunities (33%), combating poverty and reducing economic and social disparities (32%), and championing eco-friendly policies and the fight against climate change (31%). Young Europeans have a shared expectation: that society and decision-makers pay closer attention to the opinions and needs of the youth. This sentiment is even stronger among German youth, who emphasize the need for greater involvement of youth groups in decision-making.

Figure 5. *In your opinion, which one of the following issues should be given priority?*



In our two groups, young people clearly point to combating climate change and protecting the environment as the issue that should be given the highest priority (57% DE, 37% PL) (Fig. 5). The second and similarly essential issue for both groups was tackling poverty and inequality (26% DE, 28% PL). For most German participants, none of the other issues seemed to be critical, receiving less than 5% of votes and some like combating unemployment, tackling terrorism, and tackling cyber/online threats did not receive any votes. While the German youth is mostly concerned about climate change, Polish participants are also concerned about improving population health and wellbeing (12%).

When asked which specific topics concerning the climate crisis are the most important, *Climate justice* was chosen as the most significant by the German group (26% DE, 14% PL), followed by water management (21% DE, 14% PL). Biodiversity and renewable resources were each selected as the most pressing issues by 15% of German participants. In contrast, for the Polish group, only slightly higher than the other issues, energy efficiency (16%) was the top priority.

In summary, this chapter serves as a window into the complex dimensions of awareness and agency among young people in Poland and Germany. It offers insights into their roles as active participants in addressing the pressing challenges of our time, whether through shaping their trust, navigating information sources, or engaging in climate activism. Their perceptions and actions have the potential to shape the future, making this exploration very relevant in our shared pursuit of a better world. Subsequently, the following chapter explores their specific climate crisis related concerns and expectations.

Towards a sustainable future

In a world grappling with complex environmental challenges, the pursuit of a sustainable future has become an imperative shared by nations, communities, and individuals alike. This chapter delves into four critical pillars: mobility, food production, energy, and climate justice. These pillars serve as the foundation upon which our collective efforts to address the climate crisis and foster a more sustainable world rest.

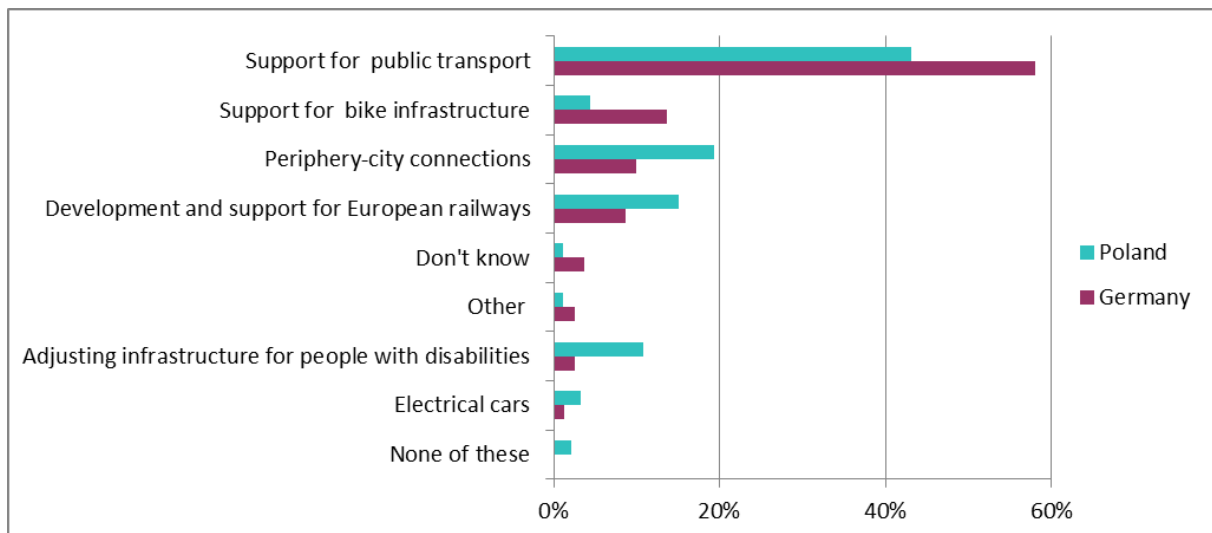
1. Mobility

In the ever-evolving pursuit of a sustainable future, mobility remains a pivotal area of concern for individuals from diverse backgrounds and nations. When delving into this topic, it becomes evident that the resounding call for *bolstering public transport systems* is a shared sentiment among participants from both Germany and Poland, garnering the support of 58% in Germany and 43% in Poland (Fig. 6). Public transport serves as the lifeblood of urban areas, offering an eco-friendly alternative to personal vehicles, reducing congestion, and curbing harmful emissions. As mentioned by those surveyed:

- **Accessible public mobility (R_DE/63)**
- **European centralization of the rail network (R_DE/64)**

Recognizing its paramount importance, it is heartening to see such a strong consensus among the participants from these two nations. However, as we delve deeper into the nuanced needs of each country, distinct priorities emerge. In Poland, the pressing demand for *improved periphery city connections* (19%) stands out prominently. These connections serve not only as conduits for sustainable commuting but also as bridges that foster economic growth and societal cohesion, particularly in regions away from major urban centers. Moreover, the Polish participants also emphasize the *development and support for European railways* (15%) as a crucial facet of sustainable mobility. Investing in rail networks not only reduces carbon footprints but also offers a convenient and efficient mode of travel, promoting connectivity across borders and contributing to a more united Europe. In contrast, the German group exhibits a unique focus, with 14% stressing the necessity to *enhance bike infrastructure*. This highlights Germany's affinity for eco-friendly transportation options, epitomizing the nation's commitment to sustainability. The promotion of bike-friendly infrastructure not only encourages healthier lifestyles but also reduces congestion and pollution in urban areas.

Figure 6. Which of the following topics concerning mobility is the most important for you?



In summary, the pursuit of a sustainable future in mobility unites individuals across borders and cultures. While the overarching need to bolster public transport resonates strongly, it is essential to acknowledge and address the distinct priorities of different regions. From enhancing peripheral city connections in Poland to advocating for bike infrastructure in Germany, these diverse

perspectives ultimately converge towards a shared goal—a future where mobility is not only convenient but also environmentally responsible. It is through these collective efforts and global collaboration that we can pave the way for a more sustainable and interconnected world.

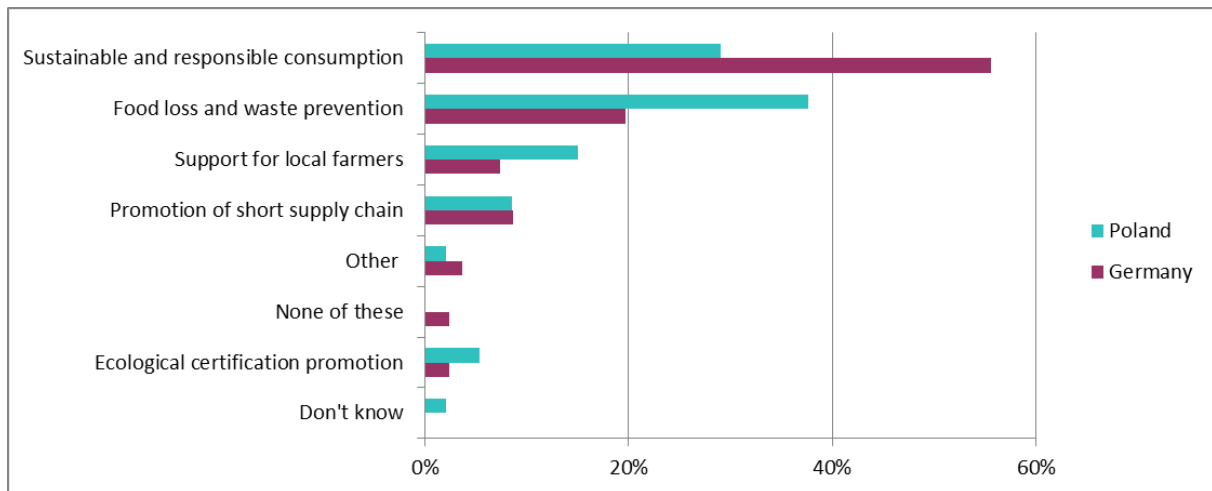
2. Food production

In our collective journey towards a sustainable future, the realm of food production emerges as a critical frontier where conscious choices can pave the way for positive change. Participants from both Germany and Poland have weighed in on the most pressing concerns, revealing fascinating insights into their priorities and aspirations. For over half of the German participants, *sustainable and responsible consumption* takes center stage, with a resounding 56% considering it the cornerstone of a sustainable food production ecosystem (Fig. 7). This emphasis on responsible consumption underscores Germany's commitment to mindful choices that reduce environmental impact, promote ethical production practices, and support the well-being of both consumers and producers alike. In Poland, while *sustainable and responsible consumption* remains significant at 29%, a compelling 38% of participants identify *food loss and waste prevention* as the paramount issue (Fig. 7). This sharp focus on minimizing food waste highlights a deep concern for resource optimization and a desire to address one of the most pressing global challenges of our time. As mentioned by those surveyed:

- **Improving knowledge about meat production and what poisonous gases are produced by it could help people reduce meat or reduce meat production (R_PL/6)**
- **In the context of the climate crisis, in my opinion, the inequality of consumption is also important, i.e. in the richest countries there is consumerism and waste of resources, and in poor countries there is hunger and poverty. The second aspect is the rising cost of organic products. It is necessary to find as soon as possible methods of production and green transformation that are efficient enough to encourage their consumers not only with ethical practices, but also with a low price. In essence, this works more for buyers. (R_PL/16)**

It's a testament to Poland's determination to make the most of every resource in the pursuit of sustainability. Interestingly, for both groups, *support for local farmers* (15% in Poland and 7% in Germany) and the *promotion of the short supply chain* (9% in both countries) rank high on the list of priorities. This demonstrates a shared recognition of the vital role local producers play in fostering sustainable food systems. By championing local agriculture and shorter supply chains, participants from both nations advocate for a more resilient and community-oriented approach to food production.

Figure 7. Which of the following topics concerning food production is the most important for you?



In essence, these insights illuminate the diverse yet interconnected visions of a sustainable future in food production held by individuals from Germany and Poland. While the emphasis on responsible consumption unites them in their pursuit of mindful choices, their nuanced priorities reflect the unique challenges and opportunities within their respective regions. Whether it's the battle against food waste in Poland or the promotion of sustainable consumption in Germany, these collective voices weave together a narrative of hope and determination—a narrative that foresees a future where our food choices nourish not only our bodies but also the planet we call home.

3. Climate justice

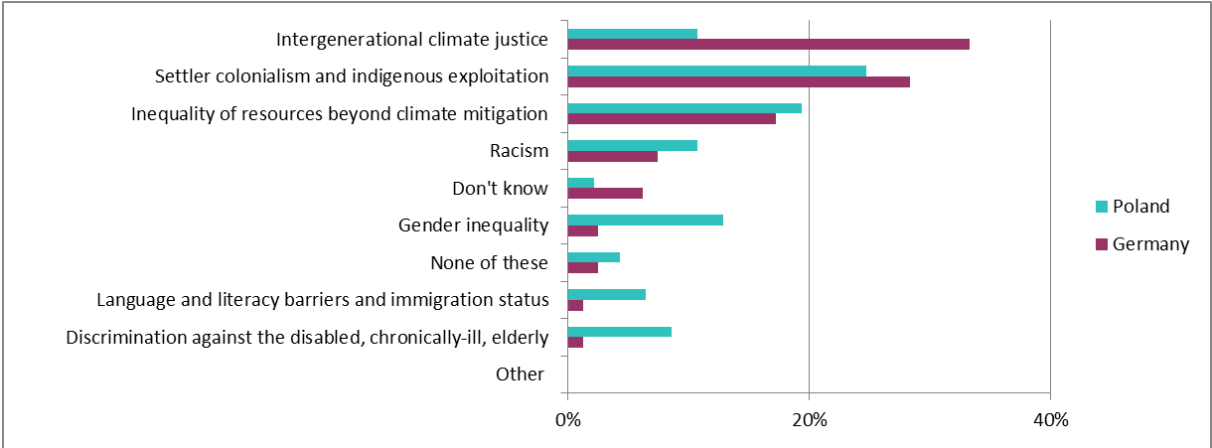
In the ongoing global discourse on climate justice, individuals from Germany and Poland have come together to voice their concerns and aspirations. Their collective vision for a fair and equitable response to climate change reveals a complex web of issues, each carrying its own weight and significance. For both groups, the unsettling legacies of *settler colonialism and indigenous exploitation* weigh heavily on their minds, garnering the attention of 28% in Germany and 25% in Poland (Fig. 8). This shared recognition underscores the importance of acknowledging historical injustices and their continued impact on indigenous communities, as climate change exacerbates vulnerabilities that have persisted for generations. Furthermore, the specter of *inequality* looms large, extending *beyond climate mitigation efforts*. In Germany, 17% of participants emphasize the urgency of addressing this broader resource inequality, while in Poland, 19% share this concern. As mentioned by those surveyed:

- **Renewal of the (capital.) economic system; a government that does not listen to lobbyists but to scientists and should receive much less salary; reformation of the school system. (R_DE/33)**
- **Willingness of the population to compromise (R_DE/62)**
- **Legal empowerment of nature, e.g., rivers (R_PL/45)**

This reveals a shared commitment to ensuring that climate justice encompasses not only the mitigation of environmental harm, but also the rectification of systemic disparities that affect vulnerable populations. Yet, for a significant portion of German participants, *intergenerational climate justice* stands out as the most pivotal issue, with 33% highlighting its importance. This signifies a

deep-seated commitment to addressing climate change not only for the present but also for the sake of future generations, recognizing the profound moral responsibility to safeguard the planet for those yet to come. In Poland, a different set of concerns comes to the forefront, where roughly one-third of participants find *intergenerational climate justice* (11%) equally pressing, alongside other critical issues like *gender inequality* (13%) and *racism* (11%) (Fig 8.). This balanced attention to multiple facets of climate justice underscores Poland's commitment to tackling a broad spectrum of societal challenges in the context of climate action.

Figure 8. Which of the following topics concerning climate justice is the most important for you?



In summary, the voices of individuals from Germany and Poland weave a rich tapestry of concerns and priorities within the realm of climate justice. While settler colonialism, indigenous exploitation, and resource inequality form common threads, the nuanced emphasis on intergenerational justice, gender equality, and racism reflects the diversity of perspectives within these nations. Together, these voices contribute to a global conversation that seeks not only to address the environmental consequences of climate change but also to build a just and equitable future for all, grounded in the principles of fairness, inclusivity, and intergenerational responsibility.

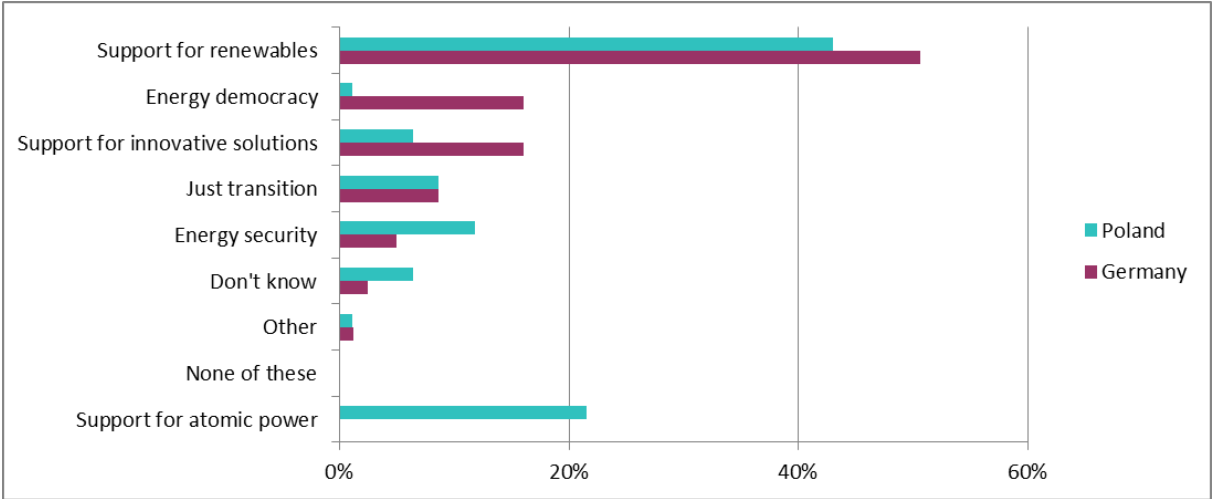
4. Energy

In the dynamic landscape of energy policy, the aspirations of the people of Germany and Poland offer invaluable insights into the pressing issues and diverse visions shaping our global energy transition. With resounding consensus, *support for renewables* emerges as the paramount concern, capturing the hearts of 51% in Germany and a substantial 43% in Poland (Fig. 9). The widespread appeal of renewable energy underscores the growing acknowledgement of its pivotal role in mitigating climate change, reducing carbon emissions, and ushering in a sustainable energy era. It symbolizes the collective commitment to harnessing the power of the sun, wind, and other clean sources to secure a cleaner and more sustainable energy future. However, the nuances of energy preferences become apparent when examining the second most important issue. For a notable 22% of Polish participants, *support for atomic power* takes precedence, reflecting a lingering belief in nuclear energy's potential to provide a reliable and low-emission energy source. As one of the people interviewed recalls:

- **Need to ban production and distribution of electric cars due to production of huge carbon footprint (R_PL/59)**

In contrast, the German group demonstrated a resolute stance against atomic power, with no support for this option. This disparity highlights the deeply rooted divergences in nuclear energy attitudes across different regions. *Energy security*, ranking as the third most prominent concern for the Polish youth at 12%, underscores the importance of reliable energy supplies in ensuring economic stability and resilience, particularly in the face of external disruptions (Fig. 9). This resonates with the recognition of energy security as a linchpin of national sovereignty and development. Turning to Germany, the focus shifts towards *innovative solutions and energy democracy*, with both priorities commanding the attention of 16% of participants. The quest for innovation reflects Germany's drive to be at the forefront of technological advancements in the energy sector, emphasizing a commitment to finding creative and sustainable solutions to complex energy challenges. Simultaneously, the emphasis on energy democracy underscores the importance of inclusive and community-driven energy governance, where citizens have a say in shaping the energy landscape and policies.

Figure 9. Which of the following topics concerning energy is the most important for you?



In summary, the voices of Germany and Poland illuminate the multifaceted nature of energy policy in today's world. While renewables hold a universal appeal, the choices surrounding atomic power, energy security, innovation, and democracy are rooted in regional contexts, historical legacies, and forward-looking ambitions. It is through these conversations and varied perspectives that we can collectively chart a course towards a more sustainable and resilient energy future.

Conclusions

The potential of youth activism in promoting dialogue on the climate crisis in Poland and Germany is a powerful force that cannot be underestimated. While voting is often considered the best way to have one's voice heard, the reality is that young people in these countries tend to vote below average. This happens partly due to a perceived sense of powerlessness, which translates into a lower interest in EU politics. However, it is evident that they still hold high expectations of the EU to listen to their concerns. To harness the potential of youth activism, it is crucial to find ways to motivate young people to vote and engage more actively in politics on the European level. This could be achieved by showing the direct impact of EU policies on climate issues, as well as by creating platforms for meaningful youth participation in policymaking.

Moreover, there is a noteworthy level of awareness and engagement among young people at the national, regional, and local levels. They have a clear understanding of what is important to them in the context of climate change and are eager to take action. Encouraging and supporting their initiatives, as well as facilitating intergenerational dialogues, can help channel their enthusiasm into effective climate actions. For a constructive dialogue between youth, policymakers, scientists, and stakeholders, we need to provide an inclusive and safe environment. To effectively facilitate intergenerational dialogue and visualize a desirable future, we need tools that prioritize active engagement, encourage self-reflection and ensure that diverse voices are heard. By adopting these principles and recognizing the distinct preferences and strengths of youth activism at different levels of governance, we can tap into the immense potential of young people to drive positive change in the dialogue surrounding the climate crisis in Poland and Germany.

The findings of this survey are particularly enlightening. They shed light on the shared concerns and nuanced regional priorities of youth in both countries, offering valuable insights into the potential of youth activism as a catalyst for dialogue on the climate crisis. First and foremost, the consensus on the need to bolster public transport systems in both Germany and Poland is a promising sign. This aligns with the broader goals of sustainability and reducing carbon emissions, indicating a common ground upon which youth activists from these nations can build fruitful dialogues. Furthermore, the emphasis on sustainable and responsible consumption in both countries underscores the importance of ethical choices in food production. This shared concern creates an opportunity for youth activists to engage in discussions and initiatives related to responsible consumption, fostering dialogue on sustainable food systems. The recognition of climate justice as a global concern, coupled with the acknowledgement of historical injustices, highlights the potential for youth activists to promote a deeper understanding of climate-related issues. By addressing issues like settler colonialism, indigenous exploitation, gender inequality, and racism, youth activists can foster meaningful dialogues that encompass a wide spectrum of societal challenges. Finally, the strong support for renewable energy sources, albeit with regional variations, underscores the significance of clean energy in the fight against climate change. Youth activists can leverage this common interest to advocate for renewable energy policies and innovations, sparking dialogues on sustainable energy transitions. In essence, this survey provides a compelling glimpse into the potential of youth activism in promoting dialogue on the climate crisis in Poland and Germany. While regional priorities may differ, the shared commitment to sustainability and climate action offers a solid foundation for cross-border discussions and collaborative efforts. Through open dialogues and the exchange of ideas, youth activists have the potential to drive positive change and contribute to a more sustainable and interconnected world.

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